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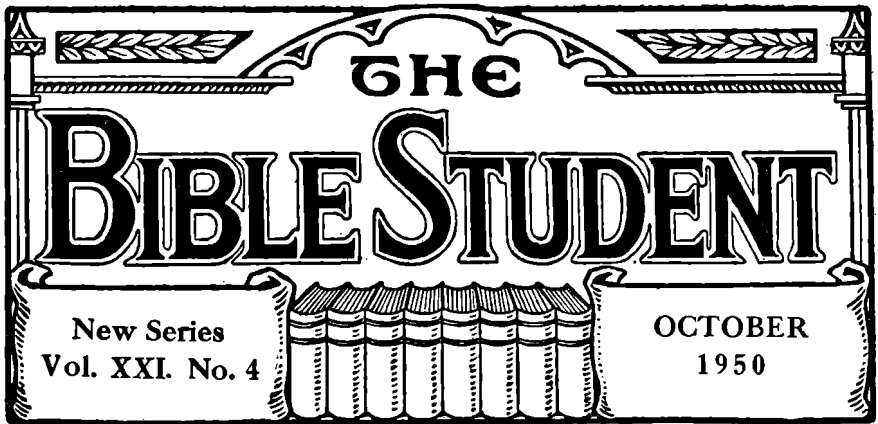
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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php



“ The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light ”

C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
IN THE HEAVENLIES	145
THE TENT DOOR	151
CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS	154
WHO ARE PRIESTS?	160
HYPERBOLES OF FAITH	165
NOTES ON HEBREWS	169
THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST	175
THE BELIEVER'S PRIESTLY SERVICE	181
EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS	188

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WHO ARE PRIESTS?

BY DAVID BARON*

God's original purpose in the choice of Israel was that the *whole nation* should be unto Him "a kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6). Neither will this purpose of God be frustrated, for the time will assuredly come when Israel—washed from her filth in the Fountain which will be opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness (Zech. 13), clothed in garments of salvation, and covered in the robes of their Messiah's perfect righteousness; and altogether decked in the beautiful garments of a priest (see margin of Isa: 61:10), and having the Great High Priest in their midst and over them—shall be known and named in all the world, "the priests of the Lord"; and all the nations in the Millennial earth shall call them "the ministers of our God" (Isa. 61:6).

The promise in Exod. 19:6 anticipates the time when "all Israel shall be saved" and enter unto all the blessings and privileges of the new covenant. But, as yet, Israel was not prepared to enter into this high calling of God: instead of being a nation of mediators and representatives between God and the other nations, they themselves by sin and disobedience were far from God, and required a priesthood to represent *them* and draw nigh to God on their behalf.

For this purpose God chose for a temporary, as it were parenthetical, purpose one of the tribes, and out of that tribe one family which, after many significantly typical ceremonial purifications, was set apart by Him for the purpose of the priesthood. Thus the Levitical priesthood in relation to Israel presents to us the picture of a circle within a circle. The appointed priests were separate from the people, and stood in a special relationship to God. This is manifest in the fact that they only had charge of and dwelt *around* the sanctuary of God, which an ordinary Israelite durst not, even within certain limits, come near far less dwell.

They were God's special property, His peculiar possession; for they were the Lord's inheritance, as the Lord was their inheritance.

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Now this idea of priesthood men have, possibly out of ignorance of God's purposes and of dispensational teaching of the O.T., persisted in holding up as a model for the Christian Church to copy. Hence the priestly element and the pretensions of men even in so-called Protestant churches. But such a doctrine is contrary to the plain teaching of the New Testament, and altogether foreign to the Christian Church and the Spirit of this dispensation.

To introduce into the Christian Church the idea of a Ritualistic priesthood separate from the people is to abolish the chief and most blessed feature of this present dispensation—which is embodied in the apostolic revelation that “there is no respect of persons with God”, and that now “there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” by whom we all have equal access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:18).

“What Moses expressed as a wish that the Spirit of God might rest upon *all*, and that *all* might be prophets (Num. 11:29), seems to me”, says Neander (*Church History*, Sect. II), “a prediction of that which was to be realised through Christ. By Him was to be instituted a fellowship of Divine life, which, proceeding from the equal, immediate relation of all to the one God as the Divine Source of life to all, should remove those boundaries within which, at the Old Testament position, the development of the higher life was still confined, and hence the fellowship thus derived would essentially distinguish itself from the constitution of all previously existing religious societies.

“There could be, in such a society, no longer a priestly or prophetic office, constituted to serve as a medium for the propagation and development of the kingdom of God, on which the religious consciousness of the community was to be dependent. Such a guild of priests as existed in the previous systems of religion, empowered to guide other men who remained, as it were, in a state of religious pupilage; having the exclusive care of providing for their religious wants, and serving as mediators, by whom all other men must first be placed in connection with God and divine things—such a *priestly caste could find no place* within Christianity (*italics ours*). In removing that which separated *from God*, in communicating to *all* the same fellowship with God, Christ also removed the barrier which hitherto had *divided men from one another*.

“Christ, the Prophet and High Priest for entire humanity, was the end of the prophetic office and of the priesthood. There was now the same High Priest and Mediator for all, through whom all men, being once reconciled and united with God, are themselves made a priestly and spiritual race; one heavenly King, Guide, and Teacher, through whom all are taught of God; one faith, one hope, one spirit which should quicken all; one oracle in the hearts of all, the voice of *the Spirit* proceeding from the Father.

“All were to be citizens of one heavenly Kingdom, with whose heavenly power, even while strangers in the world, they should be already furnished. When the apostles applied the Old Testament idea of the priesthood to Christianity, this seems to me to have been done invariably for the simple purpose of showing that no such visible particular priesthood could find place in the new community. Since free access to God and to heaven had by the one High Priest, even Christ, been opened once to all believers, they had by virtue of their union to Him, become themselves a spiritual people, consecrated to God; their calling being none other than to dedicate their entire life to God as a thank-offering for the grace of Redemption, to publish abroad the power and grace of Him who called them out of the kingdom of darkness into His marvellous light, to make *their life one continual priesthood, one spiritual worship* springing from the temper of faith working by love, one continuous testimony for their Saviour.”

To adopt the model of the Levitical priesthood in the Christian Church, which Ritualism endeavours to do, is nothing else but an attempt, with unholy hands, to sew together again the veil which the blessed, reconciled God had Himself rent in twain; and as saying, “Stand aside, come not nigh to God” to those who are “*made nigh* by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13).

Child of God, you may be the weakest and most despised on earth in the estimate of some, but the dignity and privileges of priesthood are *yours*. Suffer none to rob you of this great blessing, which has been procured for you at the cost of the life blood of the Son of God. However imperfect and sinful you may be in yourself, the moment you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ you were washed in His precious blood, and *clothed* in the pure, spotless linen garments of His perfect righteousness, and *anointed* by His Spirit, and thus made a member of that new and holy order of which the Lord Himself is the Head and whom the blessed Great High Priest of God’s anointing is not ashamed to call “brethren” (Heb. 2:11).

There are only four or five passages in the New Testament where the term "priesthood" or "priests" is used as referring to the new and spiritual order, and I need scarcely say that, in every instance the term is applied to *every* member of the Church, the Body of Christ. Look at 1 Peter, chap: 2. Those to whom the Apostle wrote were not even very "advanced" Christians, for he had to exhort them to "lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings." But he goes on, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom coming as unto a living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a *spiritual* house, an *holy priesthood* to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

In this passage several titles that are used of Christ in the singular are by virtue of their union with Him, assigned to believers in the plural. Thus He alone is the precious, elect "Living Stone", which God Himself has laid for a foundation in Zion. But once quickened by Him and united to Him, we also become "living stones". He is the true Temple, for in Him also dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. But together with Him, having Him as our "foundation", "corner stone", and "top-stone of the corner", WE also are a "spiritual house". He is the Great High Priest, but we are "members of His body", united to Him we form a "holy priesthood."

If there be any doubt as to who are embraced in the "holy priesthood", it can easily be set at rest by the question, Who are included in the "spiritual house"? For no one can dispute that both terms designate the same body, and are coextensive. It is the *whole Church* that is presented to us, both here and in Ephesians 2, under the figure of a building in process of completion, and which, when finished will be "an habitation of God through the Spirit." It is composed of *all* the "stones", Jewish and Gentile, who by the Spirit of God have been hewn from the quarry of this world, dug out of the pit of corruption and miry clay; built upon the one foundation which God has laid. That glorious building—which, when finished, will "show forth to principalities and powers in the heavenlies the manifold wisdom of God"—would be incomplete if any one, even the weakest and feeblest member of Christ's body, were wanting.

But if it be clear that all who believe (1 Pet. 2:6), and have tasted that the Lord is gracious, are included in the "spiritual

house", the Church, it is equally clear that *all* inside the Church form the new order of an "holy priesthood." The same glorious Lord is the foundation and cause of both (see verse 5, last clause).

The only other passage in the New Testament (except Revelation) where the priesthood is applied to any except Christ and the Levitical order, is found later in the same chapter of Peter's Epistle (verse 8). The two opposite effects on men as the result of Christ's work, and the preaching of the Gospel, are indicated. To some He acts like the magnet-stone, attracting them to build on Him their hopes, and so find Him to be the chief, elect, sure, and precious Corner Stone on whom, if they abide in faith, they shall not be confounded; or (as the original in Isaiah 28:16 has it) "shall not make haste," i.e., to flee in alarm or in sudden panic, either at dread of judgment from God, or from fear of any storm or flood that may come from man or devil.

On the other hand, to others, because they are offended at His word and disobedient, He becomes "a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence" on which they fall and are broken (Matt. 21:44).

The apostle then pauses for a moment, and sees beyond and above the perfect freedom with which man acts in choosing his desity, the eternal counsel of God accomplished. Even the wicked in their defiant, wilful rejection of Christ and consequent stumbling, finally arrive only at the destiny "whereunto also they were appointed."

Then from the thought of the foreordination of the wicked (because of their wilfulness) to penal stumbling and judicial punishment, the apostle's mind travels to the unmerited sovereign grace of God in the election of believers to such wonderfully high dignities and privileges, and continues in verse 9, "But ye are (not foreordained to such a destiny, but) a chosen generation (= 'elect race'), a *royal priesthood*, an holy nation, a peculiar people (or, 'people for God's own possession'), that ye might show forth the praises (or 'excellencies' or 'glories') of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."